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THE BRITISH EMPIRE

ENLARGING THE JEWEL

The Conquest of Burma and Ceylon

Australia & New Zealand 70c South Africa 70c Canada 95c

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Consultants D. K. Fieldhouse, Lecturer in Commonwealth History and Fellow of Nuffield College, Oxford
A. F. Madden, Reader in Commonwealth Government and Fellow of Nuffield College, Oxford

JIM HICKS, author of the text sections of this issue, is a product of Britain's First Empire, America. Born in Texas, he received an MA from Northwestern University where he read political science and history. As London Bureau Chief for LIFE magazine, he wrote an eyewitness report of the events accompanying Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence. He now lives and works in London.

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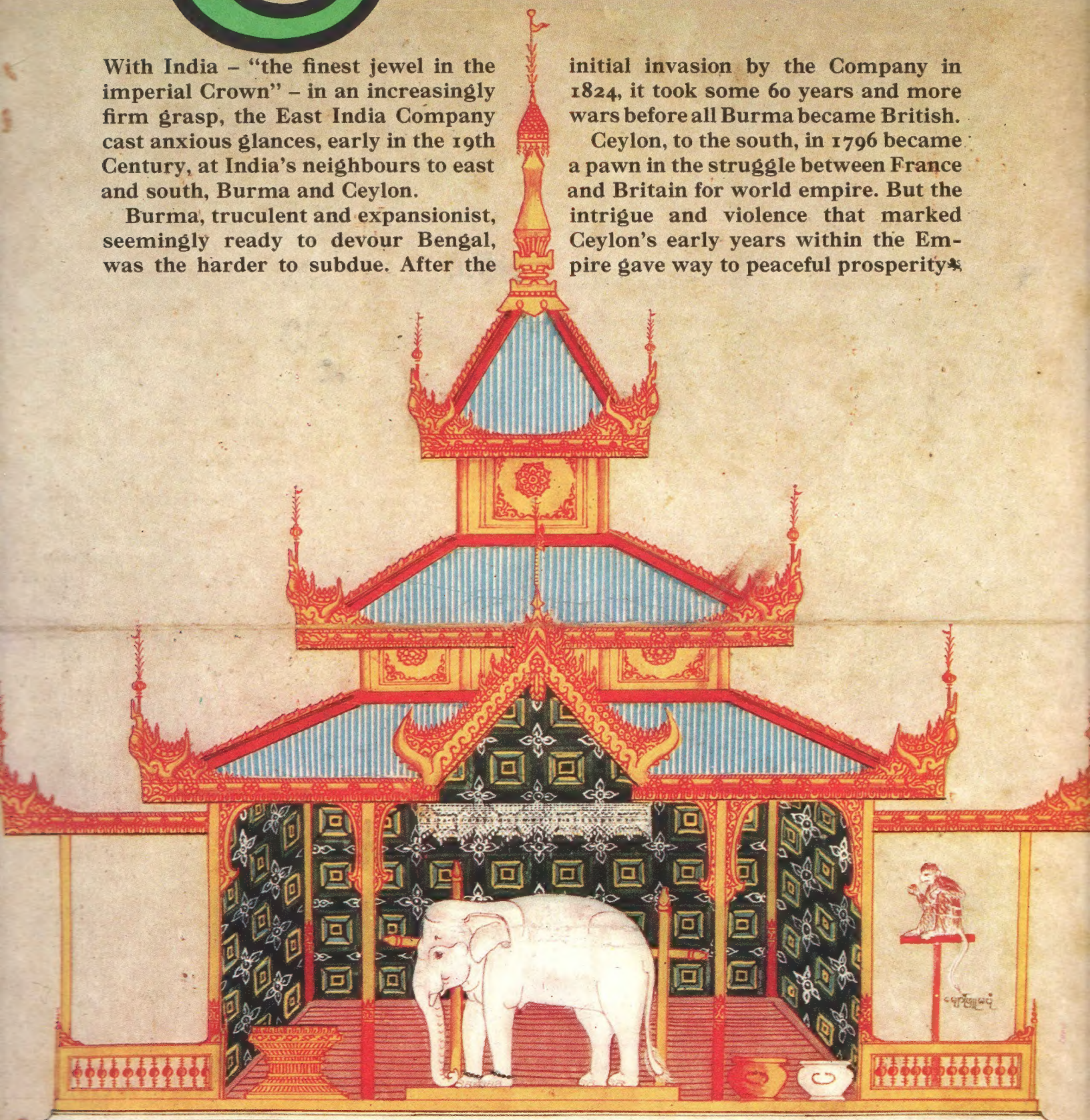
Cover: British troops fight their way into one of the many palisaded forts that the Burmese threw up around Rangoon in an effort to confine the invaders.

ENLARGING THE JEWEL

With India – "the finest jewel in the imperial Crown" – in an increasingly firm grasp, the East India Company cast anxious glances, early in the 19th Century, at India's neighbours to east and south, Burma and Ceylon.

Burma, truculent and expansionist, seemingly ready to devour Bengal, was the harder to subdue. After the initial invasion by the Company in 1824, it took some 60 years and more wars before all Burma became British.

Ceylon, to the south, in 1796 became a pawn in the struggle between France and Britain for world empire. But the intrigue and violence that marked Ceylon's early years within the Empire gave way to peaceful prosperity.



White elephants, symbols of power and majesty, were much prized by Burmese kings who housed them in Mandalay's Golden Palace (above).

By Jim Hicks

In 1824, during the First Anglo-Burmese War, Maha Bandula, Burma's greatest general, wanted to see for himself one of the enemy's "shells" which were throwing his army into such a panic. The opportunity soon came when one fell, but did not explode, near where he stood.

A party of Burmese soldiers – observing that the missile was obviously a dud by the way its long fuse sputtered and smoked – picked it up and started towards their chief, who eagerly waved them on. Fortunately for Bandula, they were still some distance away when the burning fuse reached its conclusion and brought the bomb-carriers to theirs. A man renowned for his courage, Bandula was said to have been unnerved for the rest of the day.

The story may be apocryphal, but it reflects some truths about the collision of British and Burmese civilizations. Before Burma began to fall to the British early in the 19th Century, it was a highly organized state, the most powerful monarchy in South-East Asia. It had 2,000 years of tradition behind it, a written language rich in ancient literature, and a firmly established Buddhist religion. Against this ancient country the British deployed the technological wonders of 19th-Century warfare. When the smoke cleared, Burma's independence had been destroyed, a slow process which took three wars and a little over 60 years – from 1824 to 1886.

Before Britain crushed it, Burma was itself an expansionist nation. It was, in fact, Burma's conquest of Arakan and Assam in the late 18th and early 19th Centuries that brought Burma to the borders of India and thus face to face with the British Empire.

Relations between the two powers had been brittle from the time of their initial 16th-Century contacts.

The first Englishman to visit Burma was Ralph Fitch, who arrived in Pegu (Lower Burma) in 1587. Rangoon was then a mere fishing village, but the Shwe Dagon Pagoda, the country's greatest Buddhist temple, "all gilded from the foote to the toppe," impressed him as "of a wonderful bignesse" and "the fairest place . . . that is in the world." Fitch's tales of the country's own riches and the caravans that brought from China "great store of mastic [the resin used for varnish], gold, silver and many other things of China work" began to awaken British commercial interest.

However, it was not until 1619 that the East India Company established trading stations at Syriam, Prome, Ava, and Bhamo and started to deal in Burmese oil, timber and ivory. In the middle of the 17th Century all "European barbarians" – which included Portuguese and Dutch traders as well as the English – were for a brief period thrown out of the country by the Burmese.

In 1755 a leader from Ava (Upper Burma) named Alaungpaya overthrew the Pegu dynasty in the south, which had long ruled the country, and laid the foundations of modern Burma. The King now considered himself "the Lord of Earth and Air."

In his own country, the King of Ava was answerable to none, free to make and break agreements at will – an attitude which made for a relationship of bewildering unpredictability.

A Captain Baker took Alaungpaya gifts of gunpowder, a few muskets, a gilt looking-glass and some lavender water, and offered him British support. It was refused.

Yet two years after this rebuff, in 1757, Alaungpaya reopened the discussion with a letter addressed to George II written on gold leaf studded with rubies, and containing an invitation to his court. To the English representative who came in response he gave 24 ears of maize, 18 oranges, five cucumbers and two grants of land for trading factories. Two years after that, in 1759, the British merchants at one of these stations, on the island of Negrais, were sitting down to breakfast with the local Burmese Governor when he gave a signal that brought a band of his soldiers rushing into the room. They killed the eight Englishmen present and more than 100 of the Indian employees, who manned the station.

Alaungpaya's justification for this outrage was that he had discovered the British were conspiring with Peguan rebels to overthrow him. When he died in 1760, his successor again invited British traders into Burma. Once more the traders came in, but they continued to complain of harassment as Burmese and British interests increasingly came into conflict through the remainder of the century.

In 1795, as Burma consolidated her hold on Arakan and Assam, 5,000 Burmese troops invaded British territory in pursuit of Arakanese rebels who had taken refuge there. The Governor-General, Sir John Shore, meekly surrendered the fugitives. In the years that followed, there were repeated crises over fugitives, smuggling and boundaries. War finally came when a King named Bagyidaw ascended to the throne of Ava in 1819.

A low, flat, almost worthless island called Shapuree, in the mouth of the river that separated Burmese territory from that of the Company, became the testing ground for conflicting claims. In September, 1823, the King of Ava, claiming that the island had been his property since time immemorial, sent 1,000 soldiers to evict the 12 Company sepoys who occupied it. The Burmese evacuated the island as soon as they had taken possession, and the British moved back in, only to leave again, this time driven away by sleeping sickness.

The fact that nobody actually wanted to stay on Shapuree made no difference. When Lord Amherst, the Governor-General, made a conciliatory move, the Burmese threatened to invade Bengal. Later, when the Burmese were in a mood to make the island neutral ground, the British refused. Finally, on March 5, 1824, Amherst declared war on Burma.

At home, the news of so remote a conflict was barely noticed. In India, however, British soldiers were thrilled. "Never shall I forget the shouts of joy with which we welcomed the intelligence of a war with the Burmese," wrote Ensign F.B.Doveton. "Here would be glory for a young soldier," perhaps even an opportunity to sustain "a flesh wound, in *the easiest possible manner.*"

The Burmese were also out in their reckoning. Their commander, Maha Bandula, included in his expeditionary baggage a pair of golden fetters with which to secure Lord Amherst, once he had captured the Governor-General.

Bandula at first seemed on the verge

of making good his promise. His army of 60,000 crossed the border and at Ramu, in May, 1824, almost annihilated a smaller British force. Dread and terror spread among the merchants of Calcutta, who feared they were next.

Bandula's army soon turned round and marched back into Burma, however, and for a very good reason – the southern parts of Burma had been invaded by the British. Lord Amherst had wisely seen that the Company should not fight this war in the difficult hill-country of the border areas, but should strike at the heart of Burma, the Irrawaddy River Valley. On May 10, 1824, Sir Archibald Campbell with 11,000 British and sepoy soldiers arrived off Rangoon in a fleet of warships. The next day 6,000 men went ashore, found the city abandoned, and went on the rampage.

"By night-time the greater part of the European force in the town were intoxicated," wrote an officer of the Madras Regiment, "and in this state they went rambling from house to house with lighted torches. . . . The conflagration was certainly a magnificent sight."

The British bivouacked in and around Burma's holiest shrine, the Shwe Dagon Pagoda, raising their flag on its lofty, gilded spire. The Burmese, meanwhile, hastily threw up a ring of bamboo forts to hem in the invader. "Stockades sprang up like mushrooms in every direction," wrote Doveton, "so that, look which way we would, there was ever a pleasing variety from which to pick and choose whenever our general wished to relieve the monotony of the cantonment by the excitement of a sortie."

The first of these palisades which Sir Archibald attacked was called Zwegyon. The rains had begun and British gunpowder was wet, so the Company's soldiers used bayonets.

The British next moved on the biggest stockade, Kemmendine (the soldiers called it jocularly, "Come an' dine"), defended by 20,000 Burmese. On June 3, a combined naval and military attack collapsed rather ignominiously. The British reached the stockade's high walls only to discover they had left their scaling-ladders behind, and during their retreat suffered battering fire both from their own ships in the river and from their reserve units to the rear, who thought they were the enemy trying to break through. On June 11 they tried again – this time remembering their ladders – and were victorious.

With seasonal rains turning the delta into an impassable mire, Campbell could not advance. Most of his force went down to the coast where they spent the next three months conquering Burma's maritime provinces, capturing Yeh, Tavoy, Mergui and Tenasserim.

While all this was happening, Maha Bandula, far to the north, undertook an epic march. Having heard of the landing at Rangoon, he turned his 60,000 soldiers from Bengal and drove them over the hills of Arakan, a difficult route at the best of times. He did it during the rains, when the flooding streams, leeches and malaria-bearing mosquito turned the jungle into a waterlogged nightmare.

By November, when the rainy season ended, Bandula and the Burmese were again threatening the British at Rangoon. The British soldiers may have genuinely welcomed action as an alternative to the punishment the climate was imposing on them. In six months, 1,200 Europeans and many Indians had already died, mainly from disease.

On the night of November 30 the British, now defending Kemmendine, saw the sky up-river begin to glow. Soon a vast fleet of 100-foot-long fire rafts appeared, floating towards the British ships. "The scene before us was a grand and imposing spectacle; the whole jungle was illuminated, the Golden Pagoda at Rangoon, and everything around us, was as clearly discernible as at noonday," wrote a British Officer. Behind the fire rafts, which British sailors were busily fending off, swarmed boatloads of Burmese warriors. They were joined by others from the jungle in an attack on Kemmendine, but the outnumbered British repulsed them.

On December 3, Bandula failed to take Kemmendine again, and the following day he was repulsed once more. His troops now lay in a wide semicircle around Rangoon. On December 5, Campbell surprised him with a sudden sally against the Burmese left wing. It was so great a rout that some British found time for larking. At the height of the battle a sergeant grabbed a riderless, exotically caparisoned, Burmese pony and mounted it, shouting to his comrades, "Here comes Bandoolah!"

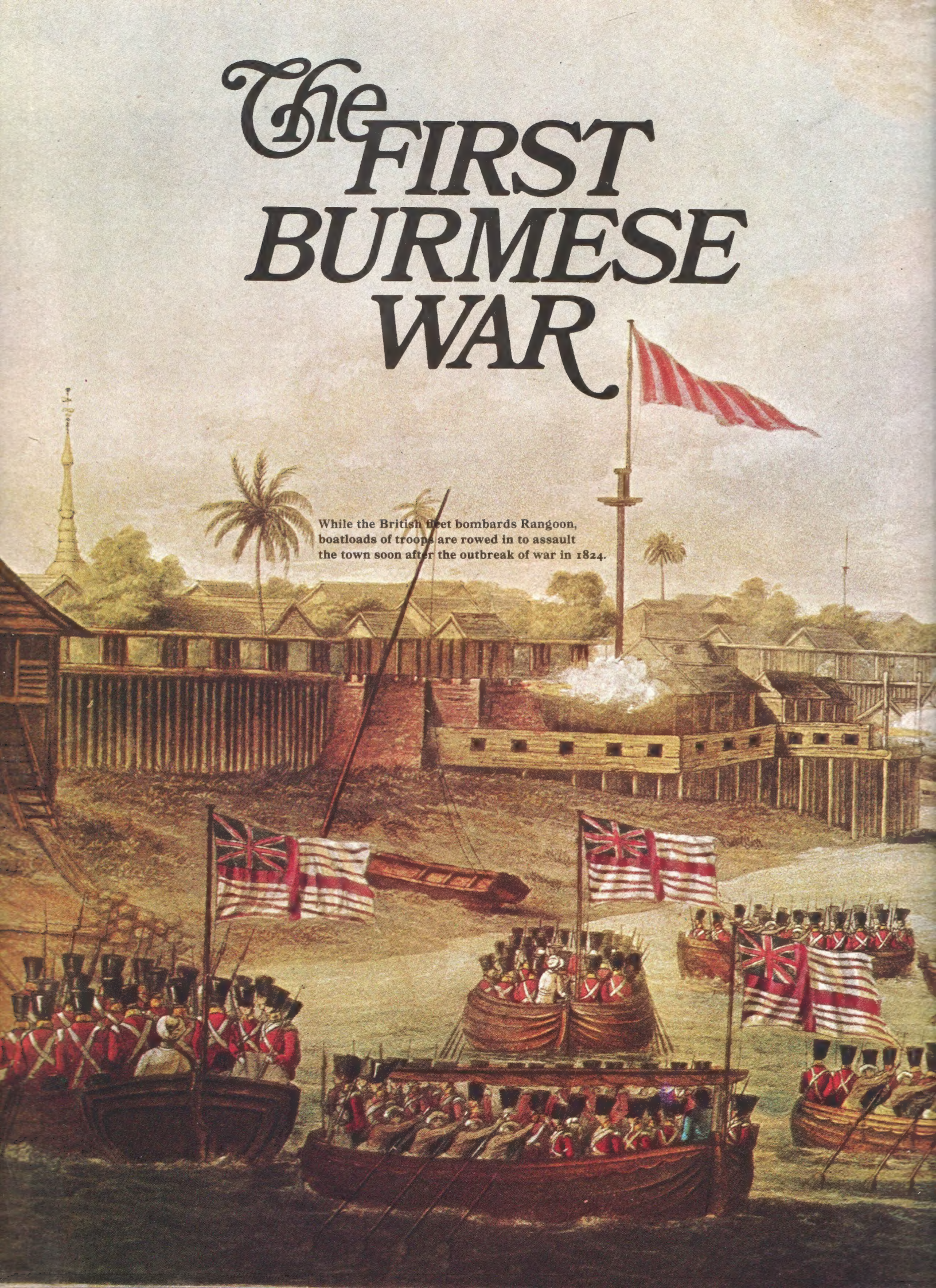
Campbell estimated that 5,000 Burmese were killed or wounded that day. Bandula managed to rally 20,000 men at Kokine, up the river, behind what Sir Archibald called "the most formidable, intrenched, and stockaded works I ever saw," but they were soon dislodged by a British force of only 1,300 men who were assisted in equal parts by superior artillery and unquestionably magnificent courage.

Bandula fell back to Danubyu, 50 miles up-river. Campbell pursued him, marching with 2,500 men by land, and sending another 1,300 in all the river-boats available. This latter unit reached Danubyu first, and its commander, a Brigadier-General named Cotton, cheekily demanded the surrender of Bandula's army, about ten times as numerous as his own. "We are each fighting for his country," Bandula replied, "and you will find me as steady in defending mine as you in maintaining the honour of yours."

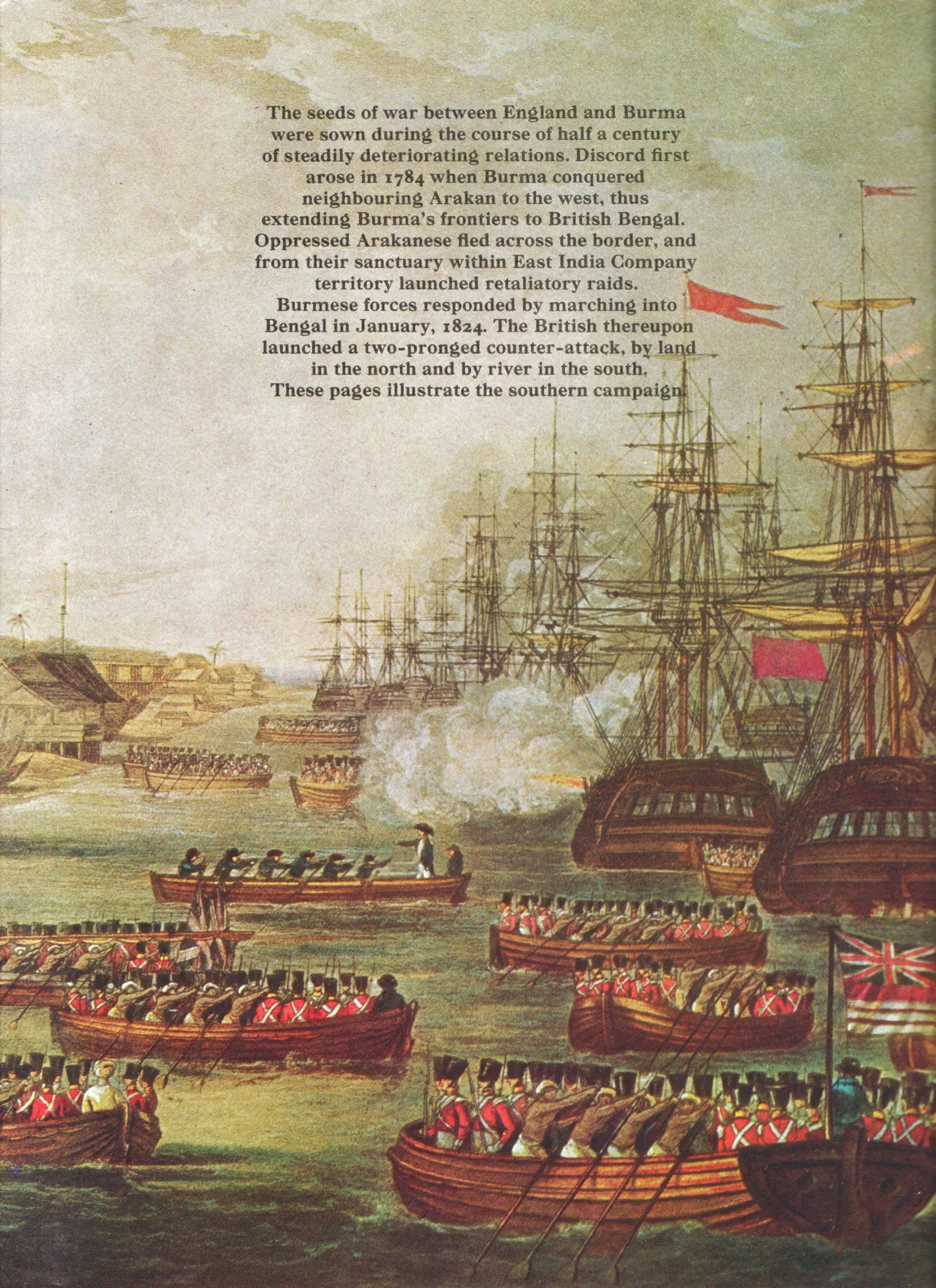
Campbell arrived and the attack began with an all-night artillery, mortar and rocket barrage on April 1, 1825. The British were still in their trenches the next day when it was learned the enemy had evacuated the stockade. Bandula, while in conference with some of his officers, had been killed by that former object of his curiosity, a British mortar shell. Although his brother tried to assume command, the death of their great general was too demoralizing for the Burmese soldiers. They fled.

Campbell advanced up the river to Prome, but could not continue to Ava because the rains came again. Meanwhile, British forces had been making progress elsewhere in the large country. They conquered Assam in January, 1825, and supported a local Prince, Gambhir Singh, who threw the Burmese out of Mampur. By the end of April, Arakan was under British control. The Burmese hastily accepted a one-month armistice to discuss a treaty, but rejected British terms. Fighting resumed when the rains ended.

The FIRST BURMESE WAR



While the British fleet bombards Rangoon, boatloads of troops are rowed in to assault the town soon after the outbreak of war in 1824.

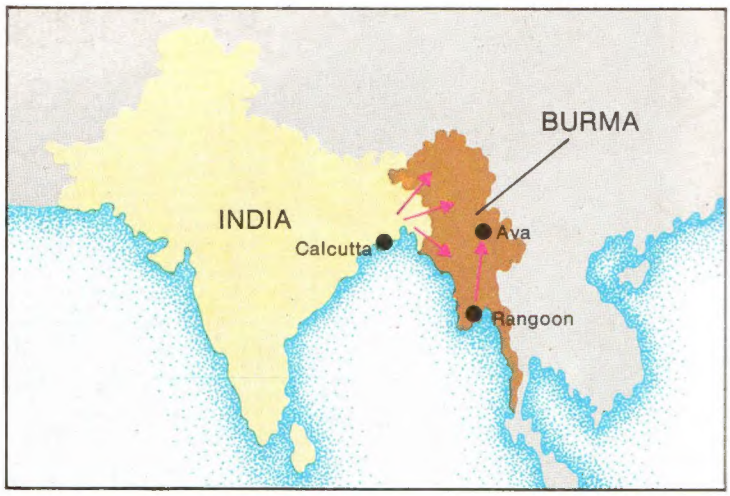


The seeds of war between England and Burma were sown during the course of half a century of steadily deteriorating relations. Discord first arose in 1784 when Burma conquered neighbouring Arakan to the west, thus extending Burma's frontiers to British Bengal. Oppressed Arakanese fled across the border, and from their sanctuary within East India Company territory launched retaliatory raids. Burmese forces responded by marching into Bengal in January, 1824. The British thereupon launched a two-pronged counter-attack, by land in the north and by river in the south. These pages illustrate the southern campaign.

British troops, in ungainly headgear and tight coatees, storm into one of the many wooden forts the Burmese threw up to confine the invaders to their beach-heads in Rangoon. Some of the stockades were topped by sharpened bamboo stakes.

A British rocket unit prepares to bombard Rangoon's forts in 1824. Although wildly inaccurate, rockets terrified the enemy.

The map below shows the routes taken by the two British forces attacking Burma: overland to the north, by sea to the south.



Easy Victory, Miserable Aftermath

The British invaded southern Burma first, hoping thereby to distract attention from their more important thrusts into Assam, Arakan and Manipur in the north, areas that threatened the security of Bengal. In May, 1824, 11,000 troops landed at Rangoon and took the city without a fight, an easy success that gave no hint of the appalling hardships that lay ahead.

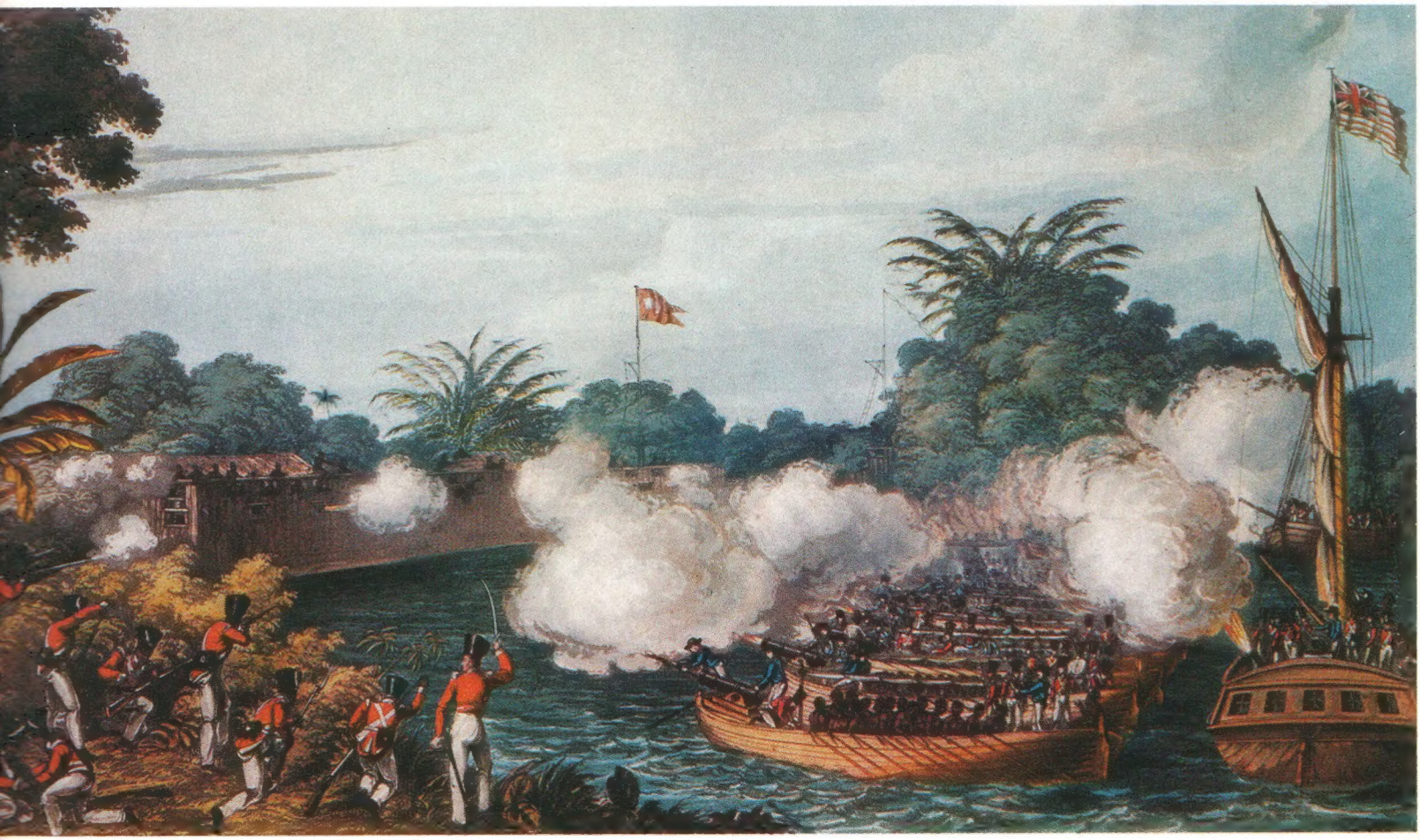
Defects in planning soon showed up. The commander, Major-General Sir Archibald Campbell, had brought neither fresh food nor transport, hoping to find both on arrival. He did not. For the next six months, the force was bogged down by monsoon rains in the Irrawaddy Delta, unable to break through a ring of enemy forts that kept him from moving up-river towards Ava, the Burmese capital. During the enforced wait, malaria and dysentery took a heavy toll of the British.

British officers seen here commanded 11,000 troops – two-thirds Indian sepoys, one-third British to "stiffen" the native contingent – in the southern campaign.

A Successful Ruse

The capture of Rangoon accomplished its purpose for it halted the Burmese advance into Bengal in the north. Much to the relief of terrified Company officials in Calcutta, the Burmese Commander-in-Chief, Maha Bandula, abandoned the offensive and swung his 60,000 men south to meet the British forces. On their arrival in Rangoon after a gruelling forced march, Bandula's men immediately dug in, and then doggedly extended their trenches towards the British lines. A British counter-attack failed to stop them, and in an increasingly desperate situation Campbell decided to outwit his opponent.

In order to convince the Burmese Commander-in-Chief that he had either pulled out or lost heart, Campbell ordered his men to keep out of sight and had the artillery reduce its rate of fire to a few desultory rounds a day. Bandula was completely taken in and was taken by surprise when 1,500 British troops sprang out of their trenches on December 7 and swept forward. The Burmese were driven from their positions and put to flight. With this decisive victory Campbell opened the road to Ava and shattered the confidence of Bandula's army, which from then on continued to retreat, unable to find a base at which it could make a firm stand against the British.



A battery of guns mounted in boats and the resolute fire of British infantry reduce the stockade at Dalla and remove the last obstacle to the British advance up-river.

British troops, sepoys and sailors advance against Burmese forces in the old Portuguese fort at Syriam, just outside Rangoon. This was just one of the many actions that the British took to neutralize enemy strongpoints in the area.

A Profitable but Costly Victory

After his rout by Campbell, Bandula retreated up the Irrawaddy River to Danubyu where he built a giant stockade and awaited his pursuers. When the rainy season ended and reinforcements arrived from India, the British resumed their advance. The view below shows the storming of the Danubyu stockade (left background), while other, troop-laden barges advance on a small group of Burmese *pras*. Taking part in the attack is H.M.S. *Diana*, the first steam-powered vessel seen in the East.

Bandula was killed in the initial bombardment, his army melted away in the night, and on April 1, 1825, Danubyu fell. Undeterred by the golden umbrellas and war elephants of the Burmese, Campbell neared Ava, and the Burmese sued for peace. The cost to the 40,000 British and Indian troops had been staggering: 15,000 had died, 96 per cent from disease. But there were compensations. Britain took Assam and Manipur together with the coastal provinces of Arakan and Tenasserim. For Burma, however, it was the beginning of the end.

II. The Death of a Nation

At Prome the Burmese tried the same tactics they had used at Rangoon, building stockades round the British position. On December 1, 1825, Campbell's men struck at one of these forts, Napadee. When the fighting ended, it was discovered that among the defenders were three beautiful and apparently high-ranking Burmese girls, two of whom were killed in the attack. The British went on, clearing out stockade after stockade, until the enemy again sued for peace on December 5.

They balked at the British terms, which required surrendering much of their territory. "The question is not how much you will cede to us," a general on Campbell's staff remarked gravely, "but how much we shall return to you." A draft treaty was signed on January 3, 1826, and the Burmese were given until January 18 to have it approved.

When that date passed with no ratification, Campbell resumed his march. He was 45 miles from Ava, at a town called Yandabo, when two European missionaries, who had been released from a Burmese prison for the purpose, arrived with a treaty and £250,000 in gold and silver as a down payment on the indemnity demanded by the British.

Under the Treaty of Yandabo, which ended the First Anglo-Burmese War on February 24, 1826, the English got the provinces of Assam, Arakan, Manipur and Tenasserim. In addition, Ava promised to accept a British Resident and pay an indemnity of £1,000,000. The war had cost Great Britain about £13,000,000. Forty thousand men had been employed in it, of whom 15,000 died, mainly from disease. The British left Rangoon when the second instalment of the indemnity was paid in 1827, a move that enabled Bagyidaw to save face. For he let it be known that the exhausted English had begged for peace, but since they did not have enough money to leave he had magnanimously paid their fares home.

The British Resident sent to the court of Ava in 1830, Henry Burney, brother of novelist Fanny Burney, found Bagyidaw as proud and unco-operative as ever. When the King, who was steadily going insane, was overthrown by his hot-headed brother, Tharrawaddy Min, in 1837, Burney was even more frustrated in his attempts to increase trade and get special concessions. Tharrawaddy completely disavowed the 1826 Treaty (although he made it clear he would not try to recapture the lost territories) and, as a monarch, refused to deal with the representative of a mere Governor-General. Burney left Ava in disgust and urged his superiors to launch a new war.

The East India Company declined to do so – yet. In 1846, Tharrawaddy also began to show signs of insanity and was ousted by his son, Pagan Min. Pagan's favourite sport was cock-fighting, but he was not averse to a little British-baiting on the side. His Governor of Rangoon, Maung Ok, seemed to regard the English merchants now established in that port as a source of supplementary income to be extracted by any available means. In 1850, Maung Ok compelled a certain Mr. Potter to pay 16,000 rupees for permission to launch a ship. Potter complained to Lord Dalhousie, the new Governor-General of India who had just finished fighting the Second Sikh War. The following summer the Governor of Rangoon falsely charged the masters of two British vessels with murder and made them pay £920 for their freedom. They asked the government of India for compensation. It was over this amount that the Second Anglo-Burmese War began. With the Sikhs subdued Dalhousie had troops to spare and he decided that the Burmese must be brought to heel.

The war, like most colonial wars, aroused little interest in London. One of the few Englishmen who objected to it, the politician Richard Cobden, said later he could find no one, in or out of

Parliament, who had read the two Parliamentary papers relating to the conflict. It would have made little difference. The reports suppressed critical evidence, even that of Lord Dalhousie, to justify the war.

Dalhousie sent a Commodore Lambert to Rangoon to investigate the case of the two captains. "It is to be distinctly understood," Dalhousie told Lambert, "that no act of hostility is to be committed at present." When Lambert reached Rangoon he was inundated with complaints from British businessmen. "Many of them," Dalhousie said later, in a statement not included in the Parliamentary papers on the war "are of old date, none are accompanied with proof, none were preferred at the time, not until the appearance of the squadron suggested an opportunity for deriving some profit from the occasion."

One notable complaint was from a Mr. Crisp, who, perceiving that a war between his own countrymen and the Burmese was in the wind, had imported a shipload of arms and sold them to the Governor of Rangoon. As Maung Ok had not paid for the guns, Crisp was now asking the government of India for 41,490 rupees in compensation. The claim was rejected.

Commodore Lambert, whom Dalhousie later called "combustible," and of whom he wrote, "If I had the gift of prophecy I would not have employed Lambert to negotiate," did not waste time investigating the validity of the complaints. Within a day of arriving he sent an ultimatum to the King of Ava, demanding that he recall his Governor. Perhaps not surprisingly with a British squadron in his major harbour, Pagan acquiesced. When Dalhousie heard that a new Burmese Governor had been appointed, he thought the crisis was over.

He did not realize just how "combustible" Commodore Lambert was. On January 5, 1852, a deputation of senior British officers tried to call on the new Governor without a formally arranged appointment. They were told that he was asleep. Lambert immediately took several hundred British residents on board his ships, and, when night fell, seized a vessel belonging to the King of Ava. He informed the King that he was "obliged" to do so "in consequence of the insults offered by the Governor of Rangoon."

The Governor tried to reopen negotiations. Lambert said he would receive him on his frigate. The Governor suggested Lambert should come to him. Lambert refused. The Governor said that if the British attempted to take away the King's ship, he would have to fight. Lambert replied that if so much as a pistol was fired he would level the riverside forts of Rangoon to the ground.

And that, on January 10, was what happened. Two ships, H.M.S. *Hermes* and H.M.S. *Fox*, started down the river with the Burmese vessel in tow. Shots were fired from the shore, and the two ships answered with devastating effect. Lambert wrote to his headquarters the same day: "I am confident the Government of India will see it was unavoidable and necessary to vindicate the honour of the British flag."

When he got word the next day that the Governor was ready to comply with all British demands, Lambert did not bother answering him. It would be war. "So all that fat is in the fire," Dalhousie sighed when he heard the news.

Dalhousie admitted that his emissary had acted "in disobedience of his orders," but once fighting had begun he fell back on the familiar need to assert the Company's authority. "We can't afford," he said, "to be shown to the door anywhere in the East." Not ready for a full-scale campaign, he stalled by sending Pagan Min an insulting ultimatum in which the compensation demanded was raised from £920 to £100,000. On April 1, 1852, he declared war on Burma.

General Sir Henry Godwin, with about 8,000 men, easily took Martaban after a furious cannonading of the fort on April 12. When the British ships opened fire on Rangoon the next day, some Burmese soldiers tried to escape the bombardment by jumping into the river – "as if resolved," wrote an English officer, "on becoming targets for practice."

On April 14, Godwin's men swept some 20,000 Burmese from their main redoubt, the Shwe Dagon Pagoda, and the enemy continued to provide entertainment for the British. Recalling the scene, Colonel William F.B.Laurie who took part in the action, wrote: "It was amusing to see them chevied through the bushes, across the plain where the artillery was drawn up, by the European soldiers. Crack! crack! crack! – away they ran, as if a legion of evil spirits were after them."

Naval guns did "fearful execution" to Rangoon. That night the city once more blazed in the darkness, "observing which formed amusement for the weary who could not sleep."

In May, Godwin with 800 men – and his powerful guns – overcame 7,000 Burmese at Bassein, 60 miles up the river. By June almost the whole province of Pegu – Lower Burma – was occupied. "But the beasts don't give in," groused Dalhousie. "There is no symptom of submission and I now give up all hope of it." Prome fell to the invaders in October but still, Dalhousie complained, the Burmese would not recognize "their actual inferiority to the British power." The Burmese simply refused to answer the peace proposals, which entailed cession of Pegu.

Patience at an end, Dalhousie annexed Lower Burma on December 20, 1852, by simply proclaiming that it was "henceforth a portion of the British Territories in the East," and told its people to "submit to the authority of the British Government, whose power they had seen to be irresistible and whose rule was marked by justice and beneficence." Two days later he had white pillars erected six miles north of the town of Meeday and informed the King of Ava that, from now on, that was its boundary.

Early in 1853 Pagan was overthrown by his brother, Mindon Min, who then tried to negotiate with the British. He was told they would be happy to have a peace treaty, but would not return Pegu. Dalhousie's proclamation was "irrevocable." Mindon, in the light of the recent campaign, understandably desired peace with the British, and ordered his people not to challenge the new frontier, but he could not accept the proposed treaty. The war ended without a formal document being signed.

The Times, which was wont to pass judgment on wars in those days the way a theatre critic might now review plays, pronounced it "generally inglorious." One report put British dead at about 3,000. It had cost £1,000,000, more than

British troops drive a Burmese army before them as they race towards Rangoon's towering Shwe Dagon Pagoda during the Second Anglo-Burmese War in 1852. The soldiers were astonished to find the Buddhist temple, focus of the country's religious life, covered in pure gold.

1,000 times the amount of the claim which began it. By cutting off Burma from the sea – "She could now reach the world only by the sufferance of the British," said a Burmese writer – the war markedly reduced that nation's ability to challenge British supremacy in South-East Asia, or even to sustain its own independence, which, economically speaking, was being rapidly eroded by the influx of British goods from India.

Despite some guerrilla resistance, Pegu was soon organized as a province of India. On the grounds that the Burmese were unreliable, uneducated, and lazy – though their patronizing critics never failed to credit them for being "good-humoured" – the new British overlords imported Sikhs for policemen, Bengali clerks for the lower ranks of the civil service, and Madras coolies for labourers. The British-owned Irrawaddy Flotilla Company began running steamers up the river in 1864. The submarine telegraph cable reached Rangoon in 1870 and a railway to Prome opened in 1877. Lower Burma was becoming British Burma.

Under King Mindon, a peaceful and popular monarch, Upper Burma was also undergoing changes. He built a new capital just east of Ava at Mandalay, brought in the telegraph, and encouraged education and religion. He even paid for the restoration of the Shwe Dagon Pagoda now in British territory, which had been damaged in the two wars.

Possession of Lower Burma tended to whet rather than satisfy the appetites of British businessmen. They kept glancing hungrily at Ava. An official report lamented the embargo on exporting opium to Upper Burma. "The use of the drug is more or less forbidden by the Ava Government to its subjects. The people of that kingdom, however, are probably quite as willing to consume opium as the people of China or India. . . . It appears possible that a considerable addition to the opium revenue might accrue were the present restrictions on the export to be removed."

The merchants were lured less by Upper Burma itself than by what lay beyond it – south-western China. The Nanking Treaty of 1842 had forcibly pried open China to trade, and British merchants were eager to press the products of Yorkshire and Lancashire into the hands of millions of new Chinese customers. Commercial circles in Britain saw Burma as a potential bridge between India and the Chinese province of Yunnan; as matters stood, it was an obstacle.

In 1862, Mindon agreed to British traders travelling to Bhamo, where they could meet caravans from China. The Indian government wanted a clause in this treaty which would exclude foreigners, other than the British from this route, but the British negotiators, knowing the King would refuse, did not propose it. By another treaty, in 1867, Mindon permitted the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company to run steamers to Bhamo and allowed a British party to explore possible railway routes leading to China.

Mindon became nervous as the British pressed for more and more concessions, especially when he learned British agents were dealing secretly with anti-Ava rebels from Burma's Shan states. To underline his position as monarch of a sovereign nation, he decided to send an embassy directly to Queen Victoria. The bypassed government of India was incensed, and Mindon was warned his envoys would not be allowed to talk business in London, but only make a ceremonial visit.

The British Press made every attempt to belittle the Burmese envoys during their tour of Europe. In Paris, the British Ambassador tried to jockey himself into the position of introducing them to the French, as if they were his protégés. The Burmese managed to avoid his unwelcome embrace, and retained their dignity: commercial agreements were signed with Italy and France allowing for the ex-

King Mindon of Burma, shielded by a white parasol, rides in procession with his army to the royal ga

change of diplomats and trade contacts.

The British government actually objected to Italy about the warmth of the welcome the Burmese received in Rome. When they were given the Italian Cross of Commander, *The Times* correspondent reported petulantly: "I am pretty sure they all went to bed last night with their crosses carefully stowed away under their pillows after the manner of good and deserving children with new playthings." In England the delegation was coolly received by the government, but its members were well fed by chambers of commerce in almost every leading city.

Mindon died in 1878. Since the throne of Ava usually changed hands in a coup, the natural death of a reigning monarch posed unusual problems of succession. Mindon had 53 queens, 48 sons and 62 daughters. One of his chief queens was Hsinbyumashin, the daughter of the late King Bagyidaw and his wife, Menu, reputed to be a sorceress. Hsinbyumashin was even more of a Lady Macbeth than her mother had been.

She had three daughters who were *supayas*, princesses held in reserve to marry whichever of their half-brothers should eventually reach the throne, a provision designed to keep the dynasty "pure." Hsinbyumashin picked 19-year-old Thibaw, one of Mindon's younger sons who happened to be in love with her eldest girl, as her choice for King. With the help of some powerful politicians, she locked up or drove from the country princes who might be rival claimants to the throne. Her oldest daughter took refuge in a nunnery rather than marry Thibaw, but he wed the other two *supayas* and was crowned.

By a practice repeated many times in Burmese history, but which had been ignored in recent years, a new King secured his position with a "massacre of the kinsmen." Thibaw's power-crazy mother-in-law re-established the tradition and in January, 1879, some 80 courtiers, including 15 of Thibaw's half-brothers and four of his half-sisters, met grisly ends in the palace at Mandalay. When word of the killings reached the outside world, indignation and threats of coercion induced Thibaw to promise that he would never repeat such a massacre.

Thibaw did not have a happy home life. After a baby son died of smallpox, his chief wife bore only daughters. He tried to satisfy his disappointed manhood by collecting a harem, but as often as not an executioner in the hire of his mother-in-law would call on one of his new girls the morning after Thibaw did.

The British were as offended by his foreign policy as by the barbarism with which his rule was associated. Thibaw began granting monopoly concessions, and not always to British companies. An old custom of the Court of Ava gave the British an opportunity to show their displeasure. They suddenly decided, after years of conforming to the rule, that it was "humiliating" to remove their shoes before approaching the King. Diplomatic relations virtually ended in October of 1879 when the British Chargé d'Affaires stormed out of Mandalay with other British residents in tow. Thibaw, surprised, sent gifts to the Viceroy of India and asked him to continue the "grand friendship."

He followed this appeal with envoys, whom the British detained at the border for eight months, insisting that the Burmese accept the terms of a proposed new treaty before arriving in Calcutta to discuss it. The mission returned to Ava when, on their last attempt to communicate with the Viceroy, the local British officer rejected their letter as unacceptable and did not keep a copy.

Like his father, Thibaw tried to reduce the English threat by agreements with other European powers. Although the commercial treaty he signed with the French in 1885 had no political or military clauses, his flirtation with France only hardened animosity in London. "We should now get *any* pretext to annex or

andalay in 1865. Despite the martial display, the King never went to war during his 25-year reign.

make Burmah into a protected state," said Sir Owen Burne, assistant to Lord Randolph Churchill, who was then Secretary of State for India.

Certainly British merchants thought so. The chambers of commerce of many English cities joined that of Rangoon in clamouring for annexation. Lord Dufferin, the Viceroy, admitted that "an independent Burmese kingdom" was the "most serious obstacle to development of the Irrawaddy trade," but nevertheless he contended that annexation did "not appear to us to be justified."

The Chief Commissioner of British Burma was more specific: "If King Thibaw's Government transgressed British frontiers, invaded British allies, maltreated British subjects, broke treaties, continued to commit massacres, rejected British projects and refused redress, matters would be different. But things have not come to any such pass."

Such scruples were soon overcome. The Bombay-Burma Corporation was fined £230,000 by Thibaw for defrauding the Burmese government as to the value of timber exported from the country. The fine was obviously excessive, although the charge may have been genuine. Anyway, it was the issue Lord Dufferin needed. Simultaneously, he moved 10,000 troops to Rangoon and sent an ultimatum to Thibaw. It required the King not only to settle the matter of the fine, accept a British agent in Ava, and facilitate British trade with China, but also to "regulate" all of Burma's foreign relations "in accordance with our advice."

Thibaw said that he would take care of the company's complaint and accept an agent on the old terms, but would submit to Germany, France and Italy the question of whether Britain should control his foreign policy. That, obviously, was not good enough On November 11, 1885, the troops in Rangoon boarded a flotilla of river steamers for Mandalay.

The Third Anglo-Burmese War was, according to one Briton, "not a war at all – merely a street row." The Burmese, thinking it would never happen, were not prepared for it. Thibaw's army was scattered all over the country. Some resistance was met and quickly put down at Myingyan. Shortly afterwards General Sir Harry Prendergast, the expedition's commander, received a message saying that Thibaw would now comply with all points of the ultimatum, and requesting an armistice.

Prendergast said it was "out of his power" to grant an armistice. He promised to spare the King's life if his troops were allowed to enter Mandalay unopposed. Thibaw agreed. A fortnight after leaving Rangoon, the British occupied the capital of Burma. There they were disappointed to find only £60,000 to confiscate from the King's fabled treasury.

The royal family was rounded up, the queens being detained overnight in the palace gardens in a summer-house which later became the bar of the Mandalay Gymkhana Club. The next day they were deported. Thibaw lived on well into the 20th Century, dying in exile during the First World War in a seaside villa to the south of Bombay.

Prendergast, bearing China trade in mind, pushed on to Bhamo, along the way terrifying Burmese villagers by flashing them with electric searchlights fixed to the roofs of the steamers. Lord Randolph Churchill ordered Lord Dufferin to proclaim annexation on January 1, 1886, as "a New Year's present to the Queen."

There was talk about putting a puppet King on the throne of Ava, but when Dufferin visited Mandalay in February the ruling nobles refused him an official welcome. Openly defiant, at first they would not attend his ceremonies. When compelled to do so they grabbed all the front seats for their low-ranking servants, forcing British notables to sit at the rear. Lady Dufferin was cross because Burmese women snubbed the nice little reception she had laid on as a gesture of reconciliation. Dufferin abolished the council of ruling nobles and made Burma part of British India. But the Burmese Army refused to surrender and melted into the jungles to carry on guerrilla warfare. To make matters worse hundreds of Burmese joined them and together they roamed the country as "dacoits" or bandits, whose marauding disrupted everyday life and prevented orderly administration.

Faced with a massive task of pacification the British tended to regard anybody who fought them as a dacoit. Included in this proscribed group were followers of royal princes, local chieftains who resisted foreign domination, and educated patriots who slipped out of Mandalay to fight in the mountains.

Dacoits twice set fire to occupied Mandalay in 1886, destroying a third of the city. There were enough of them in the hills and forests to require 32,000 British troops and 8,500 military policemen in Upper Burma within a year of occupation. One thousand dacoits were brought into Mandalay and branded with a mark that would "save the formality of a trial when arrested a second time."

The British could not understand the dacoits. A naval brigade captured 12 of them and decided to make the punishment "exemplary" by shooting them one at a time instead of altogether. The first shot took off the top half of a dacoit's skull "as one decapitates an eggshell with a breakfast knife." At this his comrades laughed uproariously, and continued laughing as they were similarly dispatched, one by one, thoroughly disconcerting their British executioners.

There was organized resistance in the remote Shan states and Chin hills, and new guerrilla activity broke out in Lower Burma. Large-scale operations against the insurgents were rejected in favour of a network of small British outposts, each one dealing quickly and effectively – village burning was a common technique of reprisal – to put down the trouble in its area. By 1891, Burma was largely pacified, although as late as 1900 more than 20,000 soldiers and military policemen were still needed in the country, and at least one rebel leader, Bo Cho, eluded the conquerors until 1920.

Though many British civil administrators thought that Burmese culture, with its written literature, high literacy rate, and strong Buddhist clergy, should be preserved intact, Burma flourished only as a British-Indian country. Rangoon became known as "a suburb of Madras." Home-produced Burmese textiles, famous for their exotic beauty, disappeared under an avalanche of cheap fabrics from Manchester. The British spent generously on education, but Buddhist literature was not taught and was largely forgotten.

Britain made better use of Burma's natural resources. By 1900 there were 141 factories in Lower Burma, most of them rice-mills. A ruby-mining concession in Upper Burma, granted soon after annexation, was by 1901 paying 17½ per cent to its British shareholders. Rice became big business; just before the Second World War, two-fifths of the world's rice exports were produced in Burmese fields.

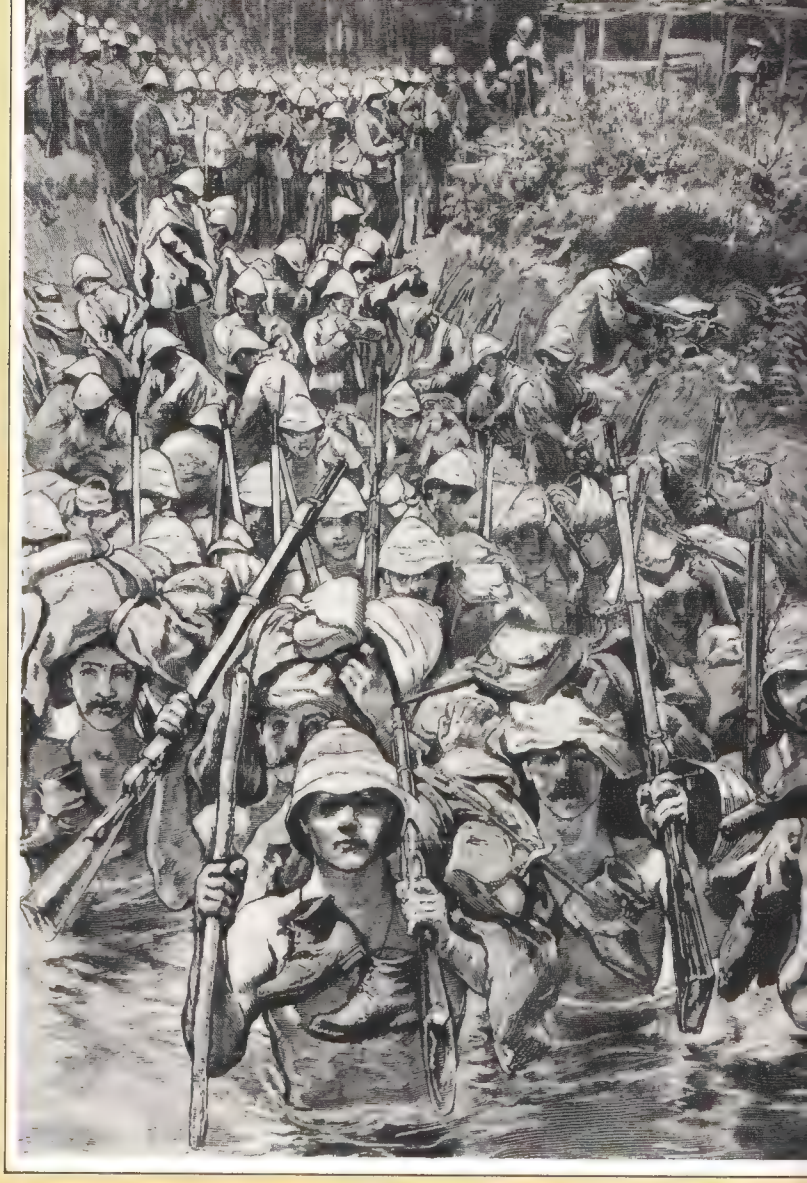
This was not entirely beneficial to the Burmese. In 1892 and 1893 a combine of millers and exporters managed to drive down the price paid for rice at the paddy by a third, which greatly increased their profits but did not help the peasants much. The government broke the cartel only when other businessmen angrily pointed out that, as Burmese farmers without money could not purchase British-made products, imports were falling off drastically.

Even after that the Burmese farmer did not fare well. Caught up in a sophisticated and unfamiliar economic system which required him to pay taxes and buy supplies before his crop came in, he fell into the hands of Indian moneylenders backed by British banks and rice-dealers. They took much of his profit, and, eventually, his land. By 1936 half the arable land in Burma was owned by banks, brokers and mortgagees.

Though imperial rule brought with it a general respite from the wars that had long plagued Burma, the period was marked by a tremendous increase in the number of violent crimes. Between 1900 and 1930, the number of murders doubled, while the incidents involving dacoits actually tripled. Some efforts were made to curb this frightening outbreak of disorder, but they had little effect. For the root causes of Burma's violence lay in the breakdown of the Burmese social and political system in the wake of annexation. Not until 1937, when Burma was separated administratively from India and given a certain measure of self-government, did the country recover its sense of nationhood and self-respect.

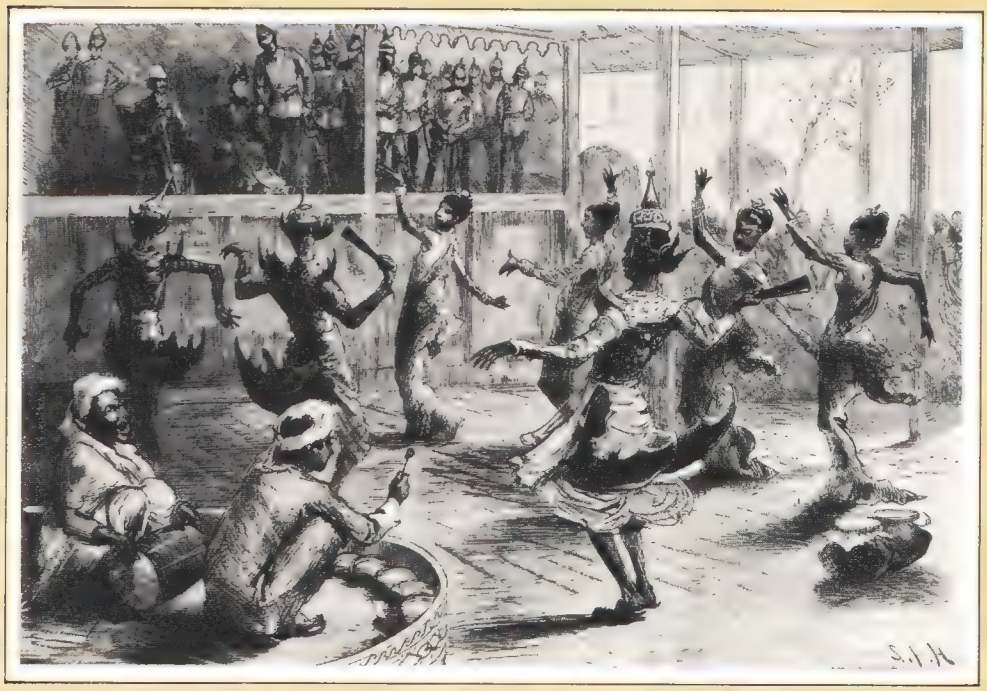
This map shows the stages by which Burma was taken over by Britain during the 19th Century, culminating in 1886, when the Union Jack flew over the entire country.

THE ROAD TO MANDALAY



In her first two wars with Burma, Britain did no more than nibble at the edges of the country. On both occasions Britain could have justified complete annexation, but claimed only the coastal regions and the Irrawaddy Delta. But in 1885 a more serious threat developed when King Thibaw virtually invited the French, who had established considerable influence in neighbouring Siam, to establish a protectorate over his country and oust the British.

When the King began to bully an English timber company, Lord Dufferin, Viceroy of India, had the excuse he needed to order an army into Burma. On November 14, some 9,000 troops advanced up the Irrawaddy by steamer and when they reached the royal capital at Ava, Thibaw surrendered. Mandalay fell on the 28th and the almost bloodless Third Burma War was over. The following year, before setting off to visit the vanquished kingdom with his wife, Dufferin formally annexed it and declared that Burma would be administered as a province of British India.



Royal mummers perform for Lord and Lady Dufferin in Mandalay. "The gestures of the ladies were graceful, but now and again became mere contortions," wrote a reporter.

Men of the Somerset Light Infantry, stripped to the waist and holding their kit out of harm's way, ford a Burmese river in 1885. Except for a few British regiments, most of the troops used in the war were Indian.

Lady Dufferin extends tea and sympathy to dejected Burmese court ladies in the Golden Palace at Mandalay. Wherever she went, Lady Dufferin's grace and charm helped to soften the blow of the British victory.

British officers auction off looted *objets d'art* in the palace at Mandalay. Some of the more striking pieces found their way into regimental messes and were accorded places of honour as trophies of victory.

III. Takeover in Ceylon

The story of Britain's acquisition of Ceylon, one of the strangest in the history of imperial expansion, should be required reading for aspiring secret agents. It is a classic example of how intrigue can be at times more effective than force in achieving a national objective.

Ceylon in 1795 was in the hands of the Dutch, who had ruled it for 150 years since throwing out the island's first European masters, the Portuguese. Britain, at war with the French, who had seized Holland and might at any time seize Dutch overseas possessions, realized that the island – particularly its grand harbour of Trincomalee in which an entire fleet could ride safely at anchor – was vital to the protection of her sea routes to Bengal.

To conquer Ceylon could be a costly and bloody business. The Dutch Governor at Colombo had a strong garrison of Swiss mercenary soldiers with which to defend it. The British decided to employ an agent, a 34-year-old Scotsman named Hugh Cleghorn, who posed as a professor from St. Andrews University.

The troops in Ceylon were only under contract to the Dutch: they actually constituted a private army owned by a Swiss nobleman, Count Charles de Meuron of Neuchâtel. Cleghorn made a secret journey to Switzerland and persuaded the Count to withdraw his troops from Dutch service by the simple but effective method of offering him more money than the Dutch were paying.

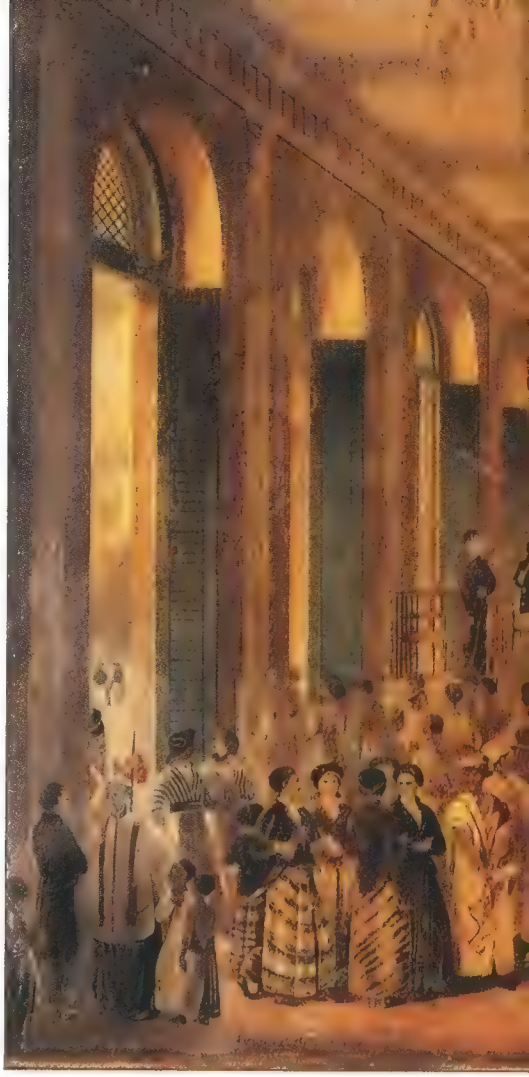
There remained the problem of smuggling the Count's instructions past the Dutch guards to his brother, who commanded the mercenaries in Ceylon. Ever resourceful, Cleghorn hid the Count's signed order in a cheese – a Dutch Edam. The message went through. The Swiss garrison deserted the Dutch Governor, who capitulated to a British force with scarcely a struggle in February, 1796. The British paid Cleghorn £5,000 for his work and added Ceylon to the Empire.

The island was turned over to the East India Company, but after two years, during which the Company's attempts to impose Indian-style taxation provoked rioting among the inhabitants, a dual system of rule was established. The Company controlled Ceylon's commerce while law and administration were in the hands of a Governor answerable to both the Company and the British government.

The first Governor was Frederick North, the brilliant but erratic son of Lord North, who had been George III's Prime Minister. North, 32 years old when appointed, was a bachelor who enjoyed living in style on his handsome salary of £10,000 a year and used to thunder round Trincomalee in a coach-and-six.

North was not a mere figurehead. Chafing under Company authority, he was influential in getting the government to end the dual system and declare Ceylon a Crown Colony in 1802, when by the Peace of Amiens, Holland formally ceded the island to Britain. He created a civil service, the first under the Crown in the East, with postal, survey, audit, education and medical departments. A remarkable linguist – he spoke French, Spanish, German, Russian, Italian and Greek – he made proficiency in the local language a pre-requisite to promotion.

His impulsiveness led him into trouble. Britain occupied only the coastal areas of Ceylon; in the interior highlands the ancient Kingdom of Kandy still main-



The King of Kandy (left) greets Joris Spilberg, a Dutch captain who landed on Ceylon in 1602. Sixty years later the Dutch were in complete control of the island's maritime provinces.

A trial takes place in Ceylon's High Court of Justice at Colombo in the early 19th Century. The jury (top left) was a British innovation "most abhorrent" to the Dutch, who had been used to courts with seven judges.

tained the independence it had enjoyed during Portuguese and Dutch rule. Although the British government was only interested in Ceylon's maritime provinces and had no use for Kandy at the moment, North decided to bring the Kandyans under British control. He began to intrigue with Pilima Talauva, their Chief Minister, or *adigar*, against the King of Kandy. "I am not sure whether I have acted like a good politician," he wrote, "or like a great nincompoop."

His self-doubt was well-placed. In 1803 he sent 3,400 men into Kandy to avenge the theft of a £300 shipment of betel-nuts. After a tortuous series of political shuffles, during which North put a puppet King on the throne, but arranged to depose him before too long in favour of Talauva, the *adigar*. The main British force returned to Colombo, leaving 300 Europeans and 700 British Malays to show the flag in the new vassal state.

This garrison soon found itself surrounded by the troops of the treacherous *adigar*, who was quite happy to destroy his nominal allies, the British, in his determination to seize absolute power. Promised their lives, the British, together with the puppet King, surrendered. Only one of them, a corporal named George Barnsley, survived to tell how the Kandyan warriors then grabbed the British soldiers by pairs, "knocked them down with the butt-end of their pieces, and beat their brains out." When the Kandyans found that Barnsley was still alive, he was twice hung, but both times the rope broke. He eventually crawled away in the darkness, was tended by a villager and ultimately rescued. The marauding Kandyans went on to invade British territory and actually came within a few miles of Colombo before reinforcements rushed from India forced them back.

The Kandyan War of 1803, said a British officer, was conducted "by both parties, Christian and Heathen, with savage barbarity." Questions were asked in Parliament, both because the war was "rank and impolitic in its origin and commencement," and because the government failed to mount a punitive expedition to avenge the massacre. The reinforcements needed for such an action could not be spared as long as the British were heavily engaged in their life-and-death struggle with Napoleon.

Through the years of uneasy peace which followed, British officials in Ceylon continued to dabble secretly in Kandyan politics. The King, Sri Vikrama Rajasinha, successfully countered the intrigues of the ambitious *adigar*, beheaded him and went on to generate an awesome reputation for barbarism hideous enough to ensure that there would be some support in Britain for another invasion, once the forces were available.

The *adigar*'s replacement, heedless of his predecessor's fate, was caught intriguing with the British – with messages written on dried palm leaves – and fled to Colombo, leaving his family behind. His children were publicly beheaded, and his wife, under threat of being raped before an audience, was compelled to pound their severed heads with a pestle. She was then drowned in a lake.

In 1814 a group of Moorish merchants, British subjects, were seized in Kandy and had their ears, noses and hands cut off. Seven were killed and the three who survived were driven towards Colombo "with the severed members tied to their necks." Soon, with the ending of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, troops were available. Sir Robert Brownrigg, then Governor of Ceylon, personally led an expedition to Kandy.

Kandyan nobles and peasants alike welcomed the British troops as their liberators from the King's despotism. Not a single British soldier was killed. The King was captured and exiled, and the chiefs signed a document which became known as the Kandyan Convention of 1815, under which Kandy became part of the British Empire while the chiefs retained the "rights, privileges and powers of their respective offices."

The convention, an attempt at some form of indirect rule, did not work. It provided for free trade to the coast which contravened some of the rights and privileges traditionally assumed by the chiefs. It said that civil and criminal cases involving Kandyans were to be tried as was customary, but it abolished torture and mutilation, which were customary punishments. The chiefs began to realize that they ranked no higher than the commonest British soldier in the forts scattered throughout Kandy.

Discontent exploded into rebellion in 1817 when a priest named Wilbawe

claimed the throne of Kandy. A British Assistant Resident sent to capture him was killed. Soon all but one of the chiefs of Kandy had joined the revolt, which received an additional boost when the Sacred Tooth of Buddha – Kandyans believed that whoever held the Sacred Tooth ruled the country – was stolen from its shrine and delivered to the rebels.

Reinforced from India, Brownrigg reacted with a severity that a British commission of inquiry later found "difficult to justify." His troops methodically burned villages and destroyed cattle and crops. "Much care was taken," wrote a British officer, "to sweep the country bare of everything, for the purpose of denying the inhabitants the means of subsistence." None the less, it was only when a new pretender to the throne appeared and the rebels began fighting among themselves that Brownrigg managed to subdue them; in all 10,000 Kandyans and 1,000 British were killed in the course of putting down the rebellion.

Mainly under the direction of Sir Edward Barnes, who was made Governor in 1824, the British consolidated their hold on all of Ceylon. Barnes, a great autocrat who had fought with distinction at Waterloo, drank excessively and built mansions for himself throughout the island. "The business of all the merry party at government house," wrote a visitor, "was pleasure." But he also oversaw the building of roads which linked Kandy to Colombo, Trincomalee, Matale and Kurunegala, instituted a regular, island-wide mail coach service, and helped promote the cultivation of coffee as an export crop by granting special tax concessions – from which he was one of the first to benefit. He opened his own coffee estate in 1825.

Despite this progress, the Colonial Office was increasingly uneasy about the way the colony was run. All power, legislative and administrative, was concentrated in the Governor. He had an advisory council – appointed by himself – but was not obliged to take its advice. The otherwise admirable road-building, like other public works in Ceylon, was accomplished by the use of forced labour under a system of conscription inherited from old Sinhalese régimes.

The Governor's cinnamon monopoly, then the only major export crop, was called into question in Parliament. There were also complaints about the fact that "one of the finest colonies in the world," with a revenue of £350,000 a year, could not – because of a large military establishment and high salaries for its administrators – pay its own way.

A commission led by Sir William Colebrooke and Charles Cameron, after thoroughly studying Ceylon's problems, in 1832 published a report which, although it was many years being implemented, established a whole new pattern for governing the colony. Colebrooke called for an end to compulsory labour and government monopolies. He recommended that the civil service be open to all, regardless of race or caste, and that education be improved for natives so they could attain "some of the higher appointments."

He suggested a legislative council which could send its proposed laws, if they were vetoed by the Governor, directly to the Secretary of State in London – and even advocated native participation on the council. A report on the judiciary proposed a system of courts removed from the Governor's control and giving equal treatment to natives and Europeans.

Sir Edward Barnes condemned the Colebrooke reforms on the grounds that they "must ultimately lead to a separation of the island from British control," which, ultimately, they did, although much, much later. Barnes resigned in protest. His successor, Sir Robert Wilmot-Horton, while a more liberal-minded man, also thought Colebrooke had gone too far and resisted instituting some of the recommendations, many of which, in any case, were difficult to implement.

As late as the end of the Victorian era, J. R. Weinman, a Ceylonese writer from one of the old Dutch burgher families, could still say that "the Governor is the Government. He is all-powerful. He wields more power within his domain than the Kaiser or the President of the United States. He not only reigns, but rules. He has the last word, and [because he need not reveal to his council what he tells London] what his last word is nobody knows." Even so, the piecemeal implementation of the reforms kept Ceylon on the road towards self-government far in advance of other British colonies inhabited by non-Europeans.

That the reforms, however slow, were important to the people of Ceylon was dramatically demonstrated in 1848. The colony was in economic trouble. Its coffee-growing industry, which had been booming ever since Barnes had given it top concessions, suddenly slumped in 1845. The prices paid in London for coffee dropped by almost four-fifths. Estates which had been bought for £15,000 were being sold for less than £500.

Ceylon had a new Governor, Viscount Torrington, whose only qualification for the job, said his political enemy Benjamin Disraeli, was that he had once been a director of a railway company. Torrington was so tactless and contemptuous of others that he even managed to alienate many of the European residents. He was hardly the man to handle the imposition of stringent new measures to end Ceylon's budget deficit.

These included a revival of forced labour (six days annually on a road gang for anyone who could not afford to buy his way out) and some taxes the Sinhalese found particularly iniquitous: on guns, which they needed to hunt food for their families, and on dogs, which abounded in every village but which did not actually belong to anyone. The result in July, 1848, was an outbreak of rioting that Torrington crushed within four days. He then executed 18 of the captive rebels, sentenced 28 to transportation, and flogged and imprisoned 66 more.

There was protest in London, especially over the public whipping of a pretender to the Kandy throne and the execution of a Buddhist monk while dressed in his canonical robes. A select committee investigated. Torrington was recalled in 1850. It was the last civil disturbance Ceylon was to experience during the 19th Century.

Ceylon was to suffer, however, a much more severe and far-reaching disturbance – in the form of an agricultural upheaval. Coffee, which had long replaced cinnamon as Ceylon's chief export, became a bigger and bigger business after recovery from the 1845 slump. In 1836, there had been only 4,000 acres planted in coffee; by 1845 there were 37,000 acres; and by 1878, coffee estates covered 275,000 acres. Tamil labourers to work the plantations were imported at a rate of up to 70,000 a year. In 1867 a railway was built from Kandy to Colombo just to carry coffee

TEA

For the early 19th Century, coffee was Ceylon's principal crop. Then, in 1869, a devastating fungus attacked the coffee-bushes and wiped them out within a decade. Undaunted, the British planters switched to tea and by 1888 the island was producing sizable quantities of the crop.

Realizing that Ceylonese tea had a golden future, millionaire Glasgow grocer Sir Thomas Lipton descended on the island and bought up vast tracts of excellent tea-growing country while prices were low. Soon bullock carts loaded with Lipton's tea were creaking into the island's capital, Colombo, *en route* for the docks (above) and thousands of workers were sorting the leaf for Lipton's burgeoning grocery chain in Britain.

A Ceylonese labourer stacks tea-chests for export.

A Delicate Harvesting

The Lipton estates were concentrated in the mountain country of southern Ceylon, where at some 6,000 feet above sea-level rows of tea-bushes flourished in a rich, well-drained soil. Since the island had no marked cold season, harvesting, or plucking, went on all the year round.

Harvesting is a delicate and highly skilled job, for the best tea comes from shoots with but two leaves and one bud. The harvesters, nimble-fingered Tamil women, worked quickly, tossing shoots over their shoulders into large wicker baskets on their backs. At the factory, the green leaves were first left to soften, and then were crushed between rollers to release juices that then began to ferment. This process turned the leaves a coppery colour. Then they were passed through the firing machines and blasted with hot, dry air to take on the black colour familiar to Britain's tea-drinkers.

Ceylonese women pick tea under the supervision of sun-helmeted planters. Baskets on their backs allowed them to use both hands; they often gathered up to 80 pounds of tiny leaves a day.

A cableway, known as a "wire-shoot," was used to carry sacks of the sorted leaves from the hillsides to the factory in the valley.

Tea-pickers sort through piles of shoots spread on hessian mats before them, discarding pieces of stalk, coarse leaves an foreign matter that even the most skilled pickers occasionally threw into the basket

An elephant takes a break from shifting timber to pose with some of Lipton's tea.

A Worldwide Cuppa

As soon as the tea had been graded and packed it was shipped to Britain, blended to ensure a consistent quality, and distributed to Lipton's shops in eye-catching yellow packets. By eliminating middlemen, Lipton was able to sell his tea at roughly half the price of competing teas, and he backed up irresistible prices with bold and ingenious promotion.

Lipton was a born showman with an enormous flair for publicity. He staged street parades and had sandwich-men dressed as Indians pacing the streets of Britain promoting the drink. Hoardings up and down the country trumpeted "Lipton's Tea," and magazine advertisements ceaselessly reminded the public that the beverage came "Direct From Tea Garden to Tea Pot." When Britain had been won over, Sir Thomas looked for a wider audience. In a matter of years his tea was being drunk all over the world and he was a multimillionaire.

A crane lifts crates of tea at Colombo Docks. They were then lowered into a lighter and borne out to a London-bound steamer.

Genial tea-magnate Sir Thomas Lipton, seen here in nautical rig, was a passionate sailor and spent vast sums building and racing ocean yachts.

IV. Disaster and Recovery

In 1869, at the glorious height of Ceylon's coffee prosperity, the island received an unwelcome visitation in the form of *Hemileia vastatrix*, soon all too commonly known as "coffee rust." At first the planters refused to believe this leaf blight could be their undoing, and continued to buy and plant more acres with coffee bushes. But within 20 years coffee rust virtually demolished the industry.

That the island's economy was not completely laid waste was the doing of one man, a Scot named James Taylor. Four years before coffee rust made its appearance, Taylor, assistant superintendant of a coffee plantation, planted 19 acres of tea as an experiment. He had no equipment. His labourers rolled the tea-leaves by hand on his veranda and dried them in clay ovens over charcoal fires. For a small-scale operation, it was successful. In 1872 he built a proper tea-house with Ceylon's first rolling machine. Coffee-planters, beginning to despair about the spread of leaf blight, came from all over the island to study Taylor's methods of tea production.

In 1875, there were 1,100 acres planted to tea. By 1890, there were 220,000 acres. At the turn of the century, there were 384,000. A whole new industry had been born out of the disaster of an old one. By 1900, the planters, spearheaded by the dynamic marketing techniques of the multi-millionaire Sir Thomas Lipton, were exporting 150 million pounds of tea annually.

The tea business was almost entirely a British monopoly. Neither the Sinhalese nor the Tamils of Ceylon had the capital necessary to start plantations. Almost all of Ceylon's wealth, in fact, was in the hands of Europeans, who constituted less than one per cent of the total population of the island.

Besides the wide gulf between the British and the non-European Ceylonese, the Ceylonese themselves were divided against each other into three main groups: the coastal Sinhalese, the inland Kandyans, and the Tamils – both those brought in from India by the British and those who had been in the island for centuries. In 1915 communal rioting broke out. The disturbances, which began when Muslims objected to Buddhist processions passing near their mosques, were actually rather minor. But Governor Sir Robert Chalmers insisted that the riots were a "foreign plot" to embarrass England during the war. He declared martial law in five of Ceylon's provinces. Hundreds of people, including Don Stephen Senanayake who was to become independent Ceylon's first Prime Minister, were imprisoned and charged with sedition. Some were killed, although just how many is not known.

An English observer told the Colonial Secretary that Chalmers and his advisers were "suffering from so acute an attack of treasonitis that nothing short of a complete change of venue from Ceylon to England" could put matters aright. Chalmers, protesting that "a revolt had been put down with rose water," was called home. A new Governor, Sir John Anderson, released 800 prisoners and appointed a commission to investigate the disturbances.

Ceylon calmed down, but the indiscriminate brutality of the repression in 1915 served as an enormous stimulus to the nationalist movement, which began to take shape in the form of parties and associations dedicated to political reform. Although independence was still a long way off, Ceylon's masters had conferred almost 70 years of peace and prosperity on the island and its peoples. "I trust," wrote a certain Robert Fellows in 1817, "that Great Britain will make her sovereignty of Ceylon contribute to the increase of civilization, to the encouragement of knowledge, the diffusion of Christian benevolence, and the consequent augmentation of the general happiness." With few exceptions, she had

Kandy chiefs, who retained certain powers, pose with a British official in 1891, when memories of past wars were beginning to fade.

Officer, 1st Regiment of Foot Guards, 1808